

Official Minutes for Webb County Commissioners Court Meeting

Thursday, August 24, 2006 at 3:30 PM

(Approved on September 11, 2006)

- Item No. 1 Call to order by Judge Louis H. Bruni
Let it be remembered that a regular meeting of the Webb County Commissioners Court was held at 3:30 p.m. at the regular meeting place with the following members present to wit:

Louis H. Bruni	County Judge
Frank Sciaraffa	Commissioner, Pct. 1
Judith Gutierrez	Commissioner, Pct. 2
Jerry Garza	Commissioner, Pct. 3
Cindy Cortez-Brunner	Commissioner, Pct. 4

Thus constituting a quorum, the Commissioners Court proceeded to act upon the Agenda as posted in the meeting notice of the 21st of August 2006. Present also were Mrs. Imelda Diaz, Deputy County Clerk representing Mrs. Margie Ramirez Ibarra, Ex-officio Clerk of the Commissioners Court, various officers and others interested in the business of the Court.

- Item No. 2 Roll Call – Mrs. Margie Ramirez Ibarra, Webb County Clerk

- Item No. 3 Pledge of Allegiance – Led by All

- Item No. 4 Commissioner's Court Budget Workshop with discussion and possible action to make changes if any, and as deemed appropriate by the court, on the FY 2006-2007 proposed budget, and any matters incident thereto.

Judge Bruni stated that he has been the only Judge in the last 20 years to submit 4 balanced budgets. He stated that he hopes that this budget will be adopted on Monday, August 28th Regular scheduled Commissioner's Court Meeting. Judge Bruni announced first witness card to come and speak.

1st witness card- Laredo Medical Group & Doctor's Hospital

Counselor Carlos Zaffirini representing the two major hospitals being Laredo Medical Group and Doctor's Hospitals spoke on behalf of their request. He stated that both hospitals are faced with a critical situation dealing with the Indigent Health Care

Funds. He mentioned that two years ago the County increased funding to these hospitals to 2.4 million dollars and an additional 1 million dollars were to be brought in from the new federal prison. He stated that his request to the Court was for the Court to amend the proposed budget and give these hospitals 3.4 million dollars instead of the 2.4 million. He explained that with these additional funds and the 1 million dollars from the new federal prison they could get a total of 4.4 million dollars. He also told the Court that according to a recent audit made by Leo Flores, County Auditor, at the end of June, they had a surplus of 1.3 million dollars. He asked the Court to rollover these monies to their new proposed budget for FY 2006-2007 instead of allocating them into other departments that overspent. Mr. Zaffirini stated that even if there was a surplus for this past year, the reason the request for additional funds is because expenses for the hospitals have risen. He stated that he would not like to see services being cut back due to lack of funding. He introduced Mr. Abe Martinez, CEO for Laredo Medical Group and Mr. Al Chapa, CEO for Doctor's Hospital to the Court for any questions that they might have.

Judge Bruni stated that he has always been in support of both hospitals. He asked the Court if they had any questions.

Comr. Sciaraffa asked Mr. Zaffirini if the surplus was at 1.3 million dollars and if he was relying on additional monies from new federal prison. Mr. Zaffirini acknowledged. Comr. Sciaraffa stated that he hopes something can be done for additional funding that is being requested.

Comr. Gutierrez stated that the question that comes up is that this funding is Corporate Welfare for these hospitals. However, she mentioned that it is important to provide services for these indigents that come to these hospitals and that it is the County's responsibility. Judge Bruni mentioned that he realizes that it is the County's responsibility, however, the State should place the burden on the City of Laredo since the majority of the indigents are from the city. Mr. Zaffirini stated that Indigent Health Care is one of the four major responsibilities of the Counties in the State of Texas. He stated that it was important for public to understand that these funds are not corporate welfares, on the contrary, they are corporate contributions to the community. He explained the requirements for eligibility for these indigents.

Comr. Garza stated that he had previously met with the two CEOs and discussed the need for these additional funds. He mentioned that from 33 million dollars deficit it rose to 77 million dollars. He stated that he had asked if this deficit was categorized among the indigents, people w/o insurance, etc. He mentioned that this deficit was solely people that came in for a service and had no means of paying. He said that there were services already being cut, however, none of these services were to have a great impact on the community.

Comr. Brunner stated that as a healthcare provider herself, she does realize that healthcare needs have risen.

2nd witness card – Tax Assessor

Ms. Patricia Barrera, Webb County Tax Assessor, mentioned to the Court that her department had already accomplished 96% and that by the end of August they would be at 96 ½%. She stated that her department and herself would really try their best to accomplish their proposed budget for this coming FY 2006-2007. The reason for this was because she did not know how the gas price increase would affect the department and the lay-off previously mentioned by Counselor Zaffirini. She also stated that for the new collections department being implemented that she would consider taking up the collections (with additional staff allocated for her department) for the District Clerk if he did not want to make these collections.

3rd witness card-Judge Elma Salinas-Ender

Judge Ender stated that she had heard that some Court members had several concerns with the Pre Trial Services Dept. She mentioned that this department came about due to Senate Bill 7. She asked the Court if anyone had any questions. She also stated that she was in support of the proposed budget for this department.

4th witness card- County Clerk's Office

Mrs. Margie Ramirez Ibarra stated that she had already passed to the Court copies of the requests that she had. She mentioned that her first request for a Program Analyst. She explained to the Court that she had already gotten a letter from MIS department recommending to her to get a Program Analyst for her

department. Ms. Ibarra stated that her 2nd request was for an additional clerk for the courts. She mentioned that cases are increasing and that she needs additional staff. Ms. Ibarra stated that her 3rd request was not a pay increase but for her to be compatible to the District Clerk. Judge Bruni stated that Ms. Ibarra knew her salary when elected. Ms. Ibarra explained to the Court that everywhere in the state the District Clerk and County Clerk were compatible. Judge Bruni mentioned that if she got a pay increase, every department head would want a pay increase too. Ms. Ibarra stated to the Court that she considered herself to be the same as the District Clerk. Ms. Ibarra stated that her 4th request was that from the Capital Outlay she was requesting a new car. She mentioned that she had no preference as far as make or model. Judge Bruni mentioned that he knew of every department having their own car except his department and now the County Clerk. Ms. Ibarra mentioned that her last request was the need for a new safe. She mentioned that the current safe was very old and all previous administration knew the combination to it. Mr. Raul Casso stated that everything all capital outlay items would be taken care of separately and that everything that was requested was taken into consideration.

Mr. Homero Ramirez, County Attorney, stated to the Court that he recommended that the Court mention whether or not any requests being made would be taken into consideration for further research or if no consideration would be made. Judge Bruni stated that all requests being brought to the Court would need further research. Mr. Carlos Villarreal, Executive Administrator, advised the Court that he was making a list of all requests being made. He also mentioned that he did some direction from the Court as to these requests. Judge Bruni stated that he would need to conduct further research on these requests. Cmr. Garza stated that what Mr. Villarreal needed was a recommendation from the Court. Mr. Homero Ramirez explained that the Court could take a motion and vote to give Mr. Villarreal any direction. Mr. Villarreal stated that he would prepare a list by next Commissioner's Court meeting so that the Court could motion on such items.

5th witness card – Planning Department

Ms. Rhonda Tiffin, Planning Department, mentioned to the Court that she was in support of the new proposed budget, however, that the budgetary items needed to be itemized in the budget.

Judge Bruni stated to the Court that Ms. Tiffin was doing a great job.

6th witness card- Utilities Department

Mr. Tomas Rodriguez, County Engineer, requested an additional slot for cashier paying at a rate of \$11.83 p/hr. Judge Bruni stated that Mr. Villarreal had already taken note of his request. Cmr. Gutierrez mentioned that this request was not going to come out of the general fund but out of the utilities funds.

7th witness card- Constable Rudy Rodriguez

Mr. R. Meza, representing Constable Rudy Rodriguez, mentioned to the Court that their request was that for the two new slots allotted for the department if it was possible to amend the salary. The amendment would be from a yearly salary of \$34,704 to \$38,174. The reason for this was so that all deputy constables would have same pay rate. Mr. Villarreal stated that he would come back with a recommendation to the Court.

8th witness card- Constable Ruben Reyes

Lieut. Mario Reyes, representing Constable Ruben Reyes, stated that if the captain and lieutenants salaries be increased by \$24,656 with fringe benefits already included. Mr. Villarreal mentioned to the Court that every time a department makes a title change, a pay increase follows.

9th witness card- 49th District Court Judge Elect Joe Lopez

Judge Elect Joe Lopez mentioned to the Court that he was in support of the proposed budget for the 49th District Court and Pre Trial Services Department. He stated that he plans on sitting down with the Board of Judges and dissecting the Pre Trial Services department. He mentioned that they will see if it is doing the job it is suppose to and bring back an evaluation to the Court.

Judge Bruni stated that it was the conclusion of all witness cards. He asked the Court if they had any comments.

Cmr. Gutierrez mentioned that she was one that was concerned with the Pre Trial Services proposed budget. She mentioned that the county had to pay a total of \$1.2 million dollars for prisoners

to be allocated at different jails in order to avoid jail overcrowding. She mentioned that all this money comes from the tax payers. She stated that she has a concern and not convinced that the Pre Trial Serviced Department is needed. She mentioned that the Court's responsibility is to the Webb County tax payers. Mr. Joe Lopez stated that unfortunately he had no actual numbers with him to help the Court make a decision as far as the Pre Trial Service department. However, he stated that he would like to get together with Mr. Carlos Villarreal, Mr. Homero Ramirez, and any other member to the Court that Judge Bruni wishes to appoint so that they can do further research on actual numbers for this department. Cmr. Gutierrez stated that last year's proposed budget was at \$150,000 for revenue and this department was only at around \$24,000 and the fiscal year is almost over.

Cmr. Garza stated that he had several concerns. He mentioned that some departments had their revenue budgeted very high. He asked Ms. Margie Ramirez Ibarra, Webb County Clerk, if she felt comfortable with the proposed revenue budget for her department. Ms. Ibarra stated that she was comfortable because the department was bringing in revenue by the selling of CDs to title companies, webb efiles that would soon be implemented, death and birth certificates new search fees, etc.

Cmr. Garza asked Mr. Frank Salinas, Indigent Services Department, if he was comfortable with the revenue budgeted for his department. Mr. Raul Casso mentioned that the reason for the increase in revenue for this department was because last year this department along with the County Clerk's department was under budgeted. This department had been budgeted at \$53,000 last year and they were at \$168,000 this year which meant they were way over their budget.

Cmr. Garza stated that he was concerned with the 10% pay increase. He stated that there would be a long discussion on pros and cons regarding this increase. He mentioned that this increase would amount to \$4.9 million and felt it was suicidal to touch such increase. He stated that it would be a burden on the tax payers who said that they were paying taxes so that Webb County employees could get an increase. He mentioned that other government entities were giving only from a 2% - 5% pay increase. He stated that he was not opposed to pay increase but that he would like to put his conscience at ease and felt that he need to present comments from his constituents. He also mentioned that

there might be alternatives to assist employee. However, if the pay increase did pass he felt that the CAA should also be included. He mentioned that these employees have not gotten an increase since October 2004 and it was for 2%.

Judge Bruni stated that he respected his comments on the pay increase. He mentioned that he did realize that it was a lot of money, however, he felt that the employees work hard to earn their salaries. Cmr. Garza stated that he was not saying that the employees were not hard working employees. He also stated that he was not making decisions based on what was going to be good or bad for his campaign. Cmr. Gutierrez said that over the past years that she has been on the Court there was always a question of what was too much or too little when it came to pay raise increases. Cmr. Gutierrez stated that the Court should make an analysis of the situation.

Mr. Carlos Villarreal asked if the Court wishes for the requests in writing made from the Commissioners be placed on the list that was to be prepared by him. Judge Bruni stated that if the Court felt that the proposed \$4 million for pay increases is better used for profit then for the Court to use it for that rather than give to employees. Mr. Villarreal mentioned that all items requested would be placed in perspective and come back Monday with a recommendation. Judge Bruni stated that Indigent Health Care has always been his top priority and that the Court would find a way to help these indigents.

Cmr. Gutierrez stated that if Mr. Villarreal could also add to his list the request for additional funding from Border Region MHMR. Cmr. Gutierrez mentioned that she was bothered with a budget item from the jail. She stated that if someone could explain the shortfall in federal inmate revenue. She mentioned that there was a \$2 million shortfall.

Judge Bruni called a Court recess at 5:55 p.m.

RECESS

(5:55 p.m. – 6:06 p.m.)

Judge Bruni called meeting back at 6:06 p.m.

Cmr. Gutierrez asked for an explanation as to how projections were made for the shortfall in federal inmate revenue. Mr. Raul Casso explained that last year's projected inmate population was at 192 inmates and there were only 155 actual inmates. He mentioned the per diem was at \$54.00 per inmate. He also mentioned that the Marshalls are to be paying a rate of \$61.00 per inmate but are not. He mentioned that was reason for first 1 million dollar deficit. Cmr. Gutierrez asked if something was being done about this. Mr. Casso explained that for this year's budget there were only 155 inmates projected at a rate of \$56.00 per inmate. Cmr. Gutierrez asked if the classification of inmates was being taken into consideration. Cmr. Gutierrez stated that the cost of housing inmates to other county jails was not budgeted on this year's budget. Judge Bruni stated that that was not under the Court's control but rather under the Sheriff's control. Mr. Casso mentioned that there was no contract with anyone for the housing of inmates. He stated that the inmates had to be housed at different county jails due to compliance. Cmr. Gutierrez stated that the county had to spend \$2 million in order to cover the Sheriff's dept deficit rather than use these monies to fund Indigent Health Care and/or Border Region MHMR.

Cmr. Gutierrez stated that she was never asked for any output to the committee (Mr. Raul Casso or Mr. Leo Flores) for any needs. She mentioned that the Sheriff needs to acknowledge and come to the Court and say why his projections were not met.

Item No. 5 Adjournment

Cmr. Gutierrez motioned to adjourn meeting. Cmr. Brunner seconded the motion.

Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.